

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS ISTANBUL 001231

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: CHP ISTANBUL CONGRESS: ONE INJURED, NO FATALITIES

REF: 2001 Istanbul 1102

¶1. (U) Summary: The Republican People's Party's August 3 Istanbul congress showcased a spirited contest between supporters of party leader Deniz Baykal and opposition groups within the party. When the votes were counted, Baykal's candidate, Sinasi Oktem, won easily, but a brawl on the congress floor highlighted divisions in the party. End Summary.

Baykal Speaks

¶2. (U) CHP party leader Deniz Baykal won only lukewarm applause when he entered the hall, a reaction that turned to sarcastic grins and angry interruptions as many delegates responded negatively to his speech. Most reactions came when Baykal claimed the party had ended its fractional "schisms" and "internal conflicts." A number of delegates told PolOfficer that the party administration had dismissed many members and brought in new ones with "arbitrary" and "unlawful" decisions. Not holding primaries before the general elections in November was another reason why Baykal opponents were unhappy with the party.

Tensions Rise

¶3. (U) After Baykal's speech, when party delegates were given the chance to speak, tensions between the opposition and Baykal supporters started to rise, reaching a peak when some of the party officials proposed ending deliberations early. This caused an uproar and ended in fisticuffs, leading to one injury.

¶4. (U) Late in the afternoon, the three candidates for Istanbul chairman made their speeches. Mehmet Boluk, a former chairman, and Batur Ilter criticized the party administration for its "anti-democratic" decisions. Both candidates complained about the party's "move towards the right," and demanded a more left-wing message to cull the votes of the poor. The two candidates' protests were disputed by the third, Sinasi Oktem, who praised the party's performance and policies. After his speech, Batur Ilter announced that he was withdrawing his candidacy, leaving only the opposition candidate, Mehmet Boluk, and the current chairman, Sinasi Oktem. The latter was elected with 409 votes.

Comment

¶5. (U) Although Oktem won the election with an overwhelming majority, the congress was a clear manifestation of the divide within the party between pro- and anti-Baykal forces. Despite a considerable number of members and delegates who are unhappy with the party's policies and the decisions made by the party leadership, Baykal seems to have managed to hang on to control in Istanbul. With a loyalist district chairman and support from most of the 140 newly-elected delegates that Istanbul will send to the party's national congress, Baykal enhanced his prospects for keeping dissent in check at that event as well.

Arnett